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SIPDIS

DEPT WHA FOR TOM SHANNON, KIRSTEN MADISON, CALEB MCCARRY  
NSC FOR DAN FISK, MIKE KOZAK  
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: REMARKS BY CUBAN OPPOSITION LEADER TO POTUS

¶1. Following is an unofficial translation of remarks made by prominent opposition leader Martha Beatriz Roque Cabello during a video teleconference with President Bush on May 6. Original Spanish version will follow septel.

¶2. (Begin unofficial translation). First I'd like to thank you on behalf of those here today for this historical opportunity not only with you, your staff but also with Mr. Parml of the US. Interests Section in Cuba and his staff.

I would like to acknowledge that we are aware of your efforts, during your two terms, to assist in the re-establishment of democracy in Cuba and you should know that you are the President who has been closest to achieving that end.

Democracy in Cuba will have to come from within and the internal opposition is the spearhead that can help bring it about.

I would like to address the current situation in the country, which to some may appear confusing, but to those of us who have been observing the behavior of this dictatorship for so many years, we can describe it as more of the same.

The regime is willing to yield slightly in the economic and social areas, but not the political realm; Raul Castro wants to enjoy his few remaining years in power and will not allow concessions that may affect his stability in power.

However, up until now, he has removed senseless prohibitions and tried to encourage farmers to increase agricultural production, which was practically abandoned.

The social situation is becoming more critical for the government, and it knows that the possibility exists for the social situation to explode. It is for this reason that the government fears the opposition on the streets, because from a small spark, a big problem can emerge.

The state of deterioration in the country is irreversible without resources, and the regime will not use the few resources it has available to address this problem. The people, and specially the youth, don't see their future in Cuba.

Our challenge is to take advantage of each new opportunity

that may be presented to us by the elimination of prohibitions.

For that we need resources, and despite all the economic assistance that your country has provided to us, the opposition has not had full access to it. How can we get one million people in the streets if we are unable to gather more than 20 at a time due to lack of resources?

We have tried to keep the government in check by distributing human rights declarations in the streets, but between one effort and another, sometimes months have to go by, before we can gather money to pay for the expenses that these events incur.

I believe that you, Mr. President, can give us the help we need, so that those of us who peacefully fight can accelerate the coming of a transition. For although it is correct to say that the exile community has made efforts to help, and documents and projects have been put forward to further our actions - to take place after the change (regime collapse) - the time between now and the transition must be shortened. This is completely our responsibility but it also indisputably depends on the help that you can give us. The internal opposition is now more mature and cohesive, although it maintains its political diversity.

I believe your country should not carry this burden alone, but that it should be shared with other countries in the world that are friends of democracy and advocates of human rights, particularly the European Union.

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It would be very important that your allies in Europe stop being guided by the Spanish policy of "patting (the regime) on the back", which in the past few months has resulted in high officials coming to Cuba and completely ignoring the opposition just to please the dictatorship.

I would like to alert you that, among the prohibitions the government plans to lift and announce through its obscure methods, is the well known "white card" (tarjeta blanca), which limits the exit of Cubans from the country. This is a means to threaten your country, as its abolishment would cause a massive exodus, something the government has been pursuing for several months, and which we have previously warned against.

For the Raul Castro administration, the key issue is to remove from the picture those who could, at a certain moment, take to the streets and in this particular case, the youth. They will try to obtain visas through other countries, giving priority to Central and South America to eventually reach U.S. borders. I believe Mexico will be particularly vulnerable to illegal Cuban migrants, but others will try to cross the border through Canada, given the possibility it offers to obtain work permits.

However the possibility that routes through European or Asian countries will be used cannot be discounted.

For a long time the exile community has used the argument that resources cannot be given to the government. As a result, remittances and family travel to Cuba were restricted. I can assure you that at the time these decisions were made I was totally in agreement with them. But times have changed and today Cubans need resources more than ever. Among other things, we need to prove that the sale of a few pieces of equipment, which is giving world the wrong impression about openness -- as portrayed by the international press -- is a fallacy. Visiting Cuban Americans would put an end to this by purchasing for their families the few reserves that the regime can afford to import. The Cubans would feel like people, since at this moment they are "made into non-persons" and the pressure for

the government to lift more prohibitions would increase.

I know that the exile community and most of the Cuban-American congressmen disagree, but I also know that one must do what is necessary at a given moment and I can assure you that at this moment, when we are so close to achieving our objectives, we have to push towards it. In addition, from an inside-Cuba perspective, without wanting to interfere in your problems, with the elections fast approaching, it would be good to have a unified position on Cuba between the two most important political parties, as the exile community is not composed only by the most radical organizations in Miami, but also by those who are not involved in politics and want to reunite with their families -- which, by the way, they already do, but illegally and without the proper controls.

Mr. President, it is also important to allow the exit of families of political prisoners and dissidents who feel they need to emigrate. We know that the government uses this as a means to send collaborators and agents to your country, which delays the application process. There are those who have helped the opposition and want to immigrate; there are also those who join the dissident movement with the sole purpose of immigrating. But working for the cause, if only for a short time, is taking on a sufficient risk, as the government harasses its opponents relentlessly.

I have not spoken of the political prisoners, for seated next to me is an ex-political prisoner who stands as their symbol. We also have the wife of a political prisoner, a Lady in White, who with dignity, will be better able to explain to you how those who suffer in prison constitute our number one priority.

Finally, I would like to congratulate you for your work against international terrorism for all these years and

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express that even though some presently disagree with you, history will take you to the podium of the rewarded for your tireless effort. (End unofficial translation).

PARMLY